The Genius of Hebrew Grammar.

Theodore Henry Robinson

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A Presidential Address delivered to the Society for Old Testament Study December 1927

By THEODORE H. ROBINSON, D.D.
Professor of Hebrew in the University College of South Wales Cardiff

1927 -
Hebrew Language

Price One Shilling and Sixpence

LONDON
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
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THE GENIUS OF HEBREW GRAMMAR

All grammar is the resultant of two forces, phonetics and psychology, the former manifesting itself most obviously in the accidence, the latter in the syntax. It is, of course, impossible to separate the two in practice. There is no meaning in an inflexion at all except in so far as it is a sound especially modified for use in a particular combination of ideas expressed in an appropriate syntactical relation. A noun presupposes the concept of an object, real or ideal; a verb presupposes the concept of an action or of a state; an accusative case presupposes some kind of combination of the two concepts in such a way that the noun limits the extension or enhances the intension of the verb. The syntax, in a certain sense, produces the accidence, and in turn the existence of inflected forms renders possible, and at the same time limits, the ways in which various concepts may be combined in formulated thought and speech. But grammarians have wisely held the two branches separate as objects of study, so far as they might. It is difficult to give adequate attention to both parts of the subject at one and the same time, but the interrelation of the two main elements in grammar must always be near the surface of consciousness.

So it comes to pass that a people's grammar is one of the windows through which the outsider may peer into its soul. It is not the only means of appreciation; we may have its art and its literature, its sculpture, its architecture, its pottery, its mythology, its poetry, its music. But in some ways grammar offers us unique opportunities for observing the psychological constitution of a nation or of a race. Other forms of expression are more or less conscious efforts at self-exposition; grammar is a natural, inevitable, and thoughtless outcome of the inner being. No people ever said 'Go to; let us invent an infinitive construct or a locative case'. It was no early Pan-hellenic congress that decided that ἵνα should be followed by the

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subjunctive or the optative. No primeval Roman senate debated the question as to whether *ad* should 'take' the accusative. It would be truer to say that the accusative takes *ad*, for the syntactical combination involving that preposition is one which implies motion, activity directed towards a definite end, and any other case than the accusative would have been a lie in the Roman soul. While other forms of self-expression always involve a volitional and personal element, grammar is the unconscious work of a race. Somebody definite and particular carved the Venus of Milo, even though we may not know his name; but who invented the construct?

Imagination may thus detect great racial characteristics in grammatical phenomena. Is it fanciful to see in the close grip that Latin maintained on its nominal forms something of that sturdy Roman objectivity which recognized and valued *things*—real things? Or in the Greek retention of the somewhat elaborate verbal inflexions an indication of a subtle and lively spirit which loved activity, movement, thought? Or in the slovenly utilitarianism of inflexionless English the practical qualities of a mind which means 'to get there', and is not particular about its road, provided that it be the shortest and most direct route? Perhaps we realize the force of this aspect of grammar only when we contemplate a spiritual hybrid such as Christian Syriac, where we have an attempt to express a Greek mind through the medium of the sounds and forms of a Semitic speech, with the result that the new thing has lost most of its Semitic character. It has had to import the time relation into its verbs, seldom employs the construct save in familiar phrases, uses adjectives freely, and actually has a recognized adverbial termination.

I.

We glance first at the phonetics of Hebrew. The language, as it has come down to us, seems to have possessed an average number of the consonantal sounds characteristic of Semitic speech in general. Unlike the Mesopotamian

dialects (the Mesopotamians were the 'cockneys' of the ancient Semitic world) it had probably a full complement of the so-called 'guttural' or 'spirant' sounds, though the alphabet was obviously somewhat deficient in its power of differentiating between allied though dissimilar sounds; ע and ח each had to do duty for two sounds. But the Hebrew organs of speech failed to negotiate three of the more difficult dental sounds, the *th*, the *dh*, and the *ḍ*. This is not altogether surprising, for other people have found the effort to pronounce these consonants not worth the trouble necessary to acquire them, and have been content with some approximation. The Hebrew attempts resulted in the production of sibilants in all three cases, the *th* appearing as שׁ, the *dh* as ז, and the *ḍ* as צ. There may be in the speech of the Hebrews relics of the old Aramaic pronunciation of their ancestors' nomad days. For instance, in a number of words where the old Hebrew pronounced *sh* while Aramaic had a simple *s*, our Biblical Hebrew has combined the Aramaic pronunciation with the Hebrew spelling, distinguishing שׂ from שׁ by the diacritic point.

Two other features of consonantal pronunciation may be noted. The first of these is the familiar aspiration of the six main explosives after a vowel sound. This is a common feature of general phonetics, though it is usually more or less concealed. One of the best illustrations is to be found in the Celtic 'mutations', though these are most obvious at the beginning of words; the Welshman says 'gwr da' for 'a good man' but 'merch dda' (dd = *dh*) for 'a good woman', since the feminine noun once ended in a vowel.

The other point is the tendency of Hebrew to lose certain final consonants. The two that are liable to suffer most are ה and נ. The latter is often a representative of a peculiar pronunciation of a final vowel, and its disappearance is inevitable if the vowel ceases to be final, i. e. if there be any addition. The loss of the final dental is familiar to all students of the Romance languages. But in one or two forms Hebrew adopted a peculiar method of preserving the consonant. This was to transpose the pre-

ceding vowel and the consonant. Thus, to maintain a final ת in the 3rd sing. fem. of ל״ה verbs, the form—occasionally still surviving—גָּלָת became גָּלְתָה. And in the feminine plurals of the imperfects of verbs the natural termination was ־וֹת, but this always appears as ־נָה. We shall have later occasion to note such forms as these.

We are on less certain ground when we speak of vowels. All vowels are produced by opening the air passages more or less and voicing the breath. There are obviously two extreme positions, one with the mouth as wide open as possible, the other in which it is as nearly shut as is consistent with the passage of the breath. These give us *A* and *U*. The quality may be modified by a narrowing of the air passage farther back and by the expansion of the mouth in one direction only. It is clear that we may have a very wide degree of variation between the two extremes, and that we can always recognize a kind of middle point at which the mouth is wide open longitudinally but nearly closed vertically, while the back of the tongue tends to rise so as to close partially the air passage at the back of the mouth. Thus we have *I*, and these three may be recognized as being practically universal vowels. They alone are represented in Arabic written vocalization, and the earlier attempts in Hebrew at indicating vowels by the use of weak consonants distinguished no more than these. But, in the nature of the case, the exact quality of a vowel in any speech is extremely elusive, and we can never hope to attain to anything more than a rough approximation to the original pronunciation of Hebrew vowels. Even if Hebrew were a living language this might be difficult, for while patience and a good teacher will enable a determined student to master any consonantal sound—except, perhaps, Zulu 'clicks' and Arabic gutturals—a Professor Higgins can detect the exact provenance of any vowel sound, and the foreigner trying to speak our tongue is nearly always betrayed by his vowels. A further complication arises when we come to consider quantity. There are people who seem unable to distinguish between a long

vowel and a short vowel—or why does generation after generation of students continue to write *Pathaḥ* in the open pretone ?—and, indeed, the actual vowel signs used by the Massoretes indicated primarily quality rather than quantity. Yet the Massoretes themselves never failed to distinguish between the main quantities—and Hebrew has no less than five—in the way they recorded the traditional vocalization of the language. I think we must assume that, generally speaking, they have given us a fairly correct presentation of the genuine Hebrew pronunciation, for in the one striking peculiarity of vowel production presented by Hebrew, they are supported by the K^{e}thibh. This is the fact that, practically speaking, Hebrew never reproduced a primitive long Â, but always pronounced it as Ô, frequently writing it with the ו. Other vowel peculiarities are dependent on that feature which is the most striking of all the phenomena of Hebrew phonetics, the enormous strength of the accent or tone.

It is on the power of its accent that, to a large extent, the music and rhythm of a language depend. The comparative evenness of French or of Bengali does not lend itself to soul-stirring poetry, while, whatever the phraseology or the theme may be, German sounds stately and powerful. But—unless again the Massoretes have grossly deceived us, as I do not think they have—no other language has ever possessed an accentual strength so overwhelming as that of Hebrew. It dominates the whole word, controls all the vocalization, and is the primary factor in the inflexional changes of the language. Standing, as it does, at or near the end of the word, it sums up in itself all the force and strength of the concept, carries the whole weight of the idea. A Hebrew word is a series of sounds leading up to and finding its culmination in the tone syllable. And the rhythm reaches back to the very beginning of the word, or rather to the very beginning of the whole group of sounds which express the single concept. It is true that from time to time there will occur syllables containing pure or unchangeably long vowels, but all the rest must

yield to the demands of the tone, and fall into the natural rhythm of the language. Most of us have stood upon the beach in heavy weather, and have watched the waves driven by the wind upon the shore. As far as sight can reach there is a mass of hurrying crests, and the eye picks out and follows one of these in its rapid progress till it is caught by the shelving sand and curls to break. Then there is a pause, as it were, a moment of fancied suspense, before the mass of water falls. I never see this sight without thinking of a Hebrew word or thought-phrase, and never have this picture far in the background of my mind as I read Hebrew for myself. You have from the start that same hurrying movement, almost impatient of the obstacles presented by the intractable pure long vowels, surmounting such as may lie in its way, and speeding eagerly till it nears the tone, and then the whole hangs for a moment in suspense in the immediate pretone, before it falls with all its crashing force of sound and sense upon the great word-accent. So powerful is this ictus that it supersedes all other laws of rhythm natural to the Hebrew language, and even gives dispensation for such montrosities as a short vowel in an open syllable and a long vowel in a closed syllable.

II.

We turn to the parts of speech themselves. Apart from interjections, we may say that for practical purposes Hebrew grammar recognizes two, the noun (including the pronoun and, possibly, the adjective) and the verb. The so-called adverbs seem to be nearly always accusative forms of nouns, and are not to be classed as forming a separate part of speech, while all prepositions are clearly more or less degraded nouns (like so many prepositions in Celtic), though some show more than others traces of their ancestry. Hence in those Semitic languages which show case endings, all prepositions are invariably followed by the genitive, suggesting that they are nouns in the construct. Several of them are plural nouns, as is shown by

the 'poetical' forms עֲדִי, עֲלִי, אֲלִי, and the forms produced by combination of these words with pronouns.

But when we try to penetrate below the surface, it is clear that the comparative study of the Semitic languages takes us back to a point at which the distinction between noun and verb is by no means clear. When we compare the way in which pronouns are attached to the Permansive in Assyrian with the forms appended to predicative nouns, we are tempted to speak of the conjugation of the noun. And there are occasional hints of the same tendency in Hebrew. We think of the Hiphʿil as a verbal conjugation, a throwing into further activity of the action implied by the verb. Yet there are certain uses of the Hiphʿil in which the concept thus projected into motion is nominal rather than verbal. Some such feeling, perhaps only unconscious in the stage of the language known to us, underlies the so-called 'inwardly transitive Hiphʿil'. A similar phenomenon manifests itself with a peculiar use of the Hithpaʿel, that which involves the idea of playing a part; הִתְמַלֵּךְ means 'to play the מֶלֶךְ', הִתְנַבֵּא 'to play the נָבִיא'. Yet in Hebrew these phenomena constitute but faint traces of a primitive vagueness as to the border-line between noun and verb; in practice the distinction is sufficiently clear.

In the noun we have the four types of inflexion familiar to every student—gender, case, number, and state. The first, of course, consists practically of that universal Semitic feminine termination *t*, which very readily disappears when final, leaving only its vowel behind it. This is a phonetic adjustment due to the essential urge of human nature towards economy of effort, and may be paralleled elsewhere, particularly in modern Romance languages. It is the same impulse which led the Hebrew to say סוּסָה for סוּסָת, the Frenchman to say *é* alike for *est* and for *et*, and the Italian to reduce the Latin stem *civitat* to *civita*, and then to *città*.

Case is a more complicated subject. Apart from the nominative, or case of independence, Semitic languages have only two inflexional forms coming under this head. We call them the accusative and the genitive, but the

names are misleading if they let us think of the Indo-European inflexions to which the terms originally apply. Whenever a noun is used to modify the idea expressed by a verb, to limit its range of activity or to expand its content, that noun is in the accusative. It is strictly an 'ad-verbal' case, and may imply, not merely motion towards or the direct object of the verb, but also rest in a place, the manner or time of the action, or even, in a few instances, the place where the action originated. Of course all the possible uses of the accusative involve relations which can be more certainly expressed by the use of prepositions. Even the direct object has its preposition—confined, it is true, to determined or defined nouns—and it always seems to me to show a lack of appreciation of the genius of Hebrew to say 'אֵת[1] is the sign of the accusative'. How can it be? 'The sign of the direct object', possibly, but not 'of the accusative', and a juster phrase would be 'a preposition indicating the direct object'.

In the same way the 'genitive' is an 'ad-nominal' case, used whenever a noun limits the reference or expands the content of another noun. Whenever two nominal concepts are combined—and we must speak of this later—the second element in the resultant term will be in the genitive. As with the accusative, the possibilities of variety in *nuance* are very wide, but we need not elaborate them here.

Hebrew has lost its case-endings almost completely, but enough survives to show that the language once formed these inflexions in the same way as other groups of Semitic speech, i.e. by appending (to the stem) an unaccented syllable consisting of a vowel which when the word stood undefined at the end of a conceptual unit was nasalized. The deficiencies of the alphabet made it necessary to represent this nasalization by an ordinary consonant, which was in Arabic *N* (ingeniously indicated as being not quite a full consonant in the singular), and in Hebrew and the Mesopotamian dialects (especially in their older forms) *M*. A similar problem faced the first writers of Latin and

[1] This is, of course, quite distinct from the אֵת which means 'with'.

Greek. Their speech had occasionally a final nasalization for which in Sanskrit the Nâgarî alphabet has a separate sign, but which Latin represented by *M* and Greek by *N* —the latter attaining to full consonantal rank, while the former remained a mere nasalization, as its elision before vowels shows. The characteristic vowels of the three cases were, of course, *U* for the nominative, *A* for the 'accusative', and *I* for the 'genitive'. Traces of the first and last are supposed occasionally to be found in Hebrew, and it is interesting to note that the instances sometimes quoted and claimed come not infrequently from later passages. But about the 'accusative' there is no possible doubt, as it has survived in a number of familiar words. We have an instance of the final *A* without the nasalization in the so-called 'locative ה'—where, of course, the ה is merely a carrier for the final vowel—and in the word הַלַּיְלָה, most commonly used with the article. Nasalized forms of the indefinite 'accusative' are familiar in the so-called 'adverbs' of the form of רֵיקָם, חִנָּם, &c.

It is possible that we realize the full import of this final case-vowel only when we come to contemplate the plural forms. Leaving out for a time the feminines, which seem to have been a formation altogether later than the plurals, we note at once that Semitic languages formed their plurals in a really sensible and intelligent fashion. In order to convey the impression of multitude they threw the weight of the word on to this final syllable and drawled it out. If a sound like sûsŭ means one horse, it is inevitable that when a man says sûsŭ he wishes his hearers to understand that he is speaking of a lot of horses. We may assume that the case-vowel remained, though even in Arabic and Assyrian that of the 'accusative' has been lost, and the 'genitive' had to do duty for both oblique cases. In Hebrew the process has gone even farther, and it is the 'genitive' alone that has survived—at least in the noun. The projection of the tone forward has the natural effect of modifying the whole of the vocalization, except where there are unchangeable vowels, and so we have the

type form דְּבָרִים. It would seem that the case terminations in the feminine are a later development, for the syllable that is lengthened and stressed is not the case-syllable, but the gender-syllable, giving a termination *ât*, which, of course, in Hebrew becomes וֹת—.

It is in the state inflexions that the peculiar Hebrew psychology most clearly shows itself. As Pedersen so well puts it, the Hebrew mind thought of the whole as a whole and not as an aggregate of different parts. When it combined two concepts indicated by nouns, it no longer contemplated them separately, but thought of them as forming a new complex idea. Where the Indo-European mind would regard the two words as expressions of independent but related concepts, the Semite thought of them as being elements in a new whole. This is to some extent apparent in Arabic and Assyrian, for in both the groups to which these languages belong the first of the two elements, being no longer the expression of a complete concept, loses the nasalization which marks the phonetic conclusion of the tone-group, indicating an independent concept. This in itself implies that thought and sound alike run on to the end of the complex sound-group, which consists of two or more elements, originally independent, but now welded into a single thought-whole. This is even clearer in Hebrew, for the vocalization of the word may undergo a complete change—indeed, it will necessarily be modified unless its vowels are unchangeable—its musical rhythm being now oriented to a stressed syllable, not in the originally independent first element, but at the conclusion of the whole. Thus Hebrew used the sound-group דָּבָר to express a certain concept, but when it sought to combine that concept with another, and to speak of 'the word of the king' it used a group דְּבַר הַמֶּלֶךְ, in which the syllable מֶּ carries the main accent for the whole phrase, and all that precedes it leads up to it with the same hurrying movement which is characteristic of the single word by itself. This connexion in thought is still more marked where the former word is in the plural. First the nasalization disap-

pears, since the end of the word is no longer the end of the complex concept, then still further all changeable vowels are reduced to their lowest terms, always provided that two vocal shewas do not come together. Hence we have דִּבְרִים, but דִּבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, the final vowel of the first word assuming a form more natural to the tone long than to the pure long of the absolute. Similarly in the feminine singular, since the gender termination is no longer final, considered from the point of view of the complex concept, the concluding ת does not disappear, and all vowels are in accordance with the laws of the syllable in relation to the tone, which, in this instance, is on the next word.

The connexion indicated by the construct relation is, in fact, much more closely akin psychologically to the compound words so common in Teutonic languages (but impossible in Celtic) than to a pair of words linked by a simple genitive relation such as we normally find in Indo-European languages. In this connexion I may call attention to a parallel which has been drawn between the Semitic construct relation and the way in which words are sometimes connected in Celtic languages, if only because I believe the analogy to be fundamentally false. It is quite true that סוּס הַמֶּלֶךְ may be translated into Welsh with absolute literalness, *ceffyl y brenin*, but the latter construction is due to the loss of original case endings, not to any welding together in thought of the two concepts. This can be tested by applying an adjective. The Semitic construct relation is so close that no word can come in between the two members of the new complex term, while an adjective which applied to one part only must of necessity be placed at the end. Thus Welsh can say *ceffyl da y brenin*, meaning 'the king's good horse', but סוּס טוֹב הַמֶּלֶךְ in Hebrew could only mean 'the king *is* a good horse'! In spite of the specious similarity between the two constructions, the psychological basis of the two is entirely different. Of course, when the Hebrew said סוּס הַמֶּלֶךְ הַטּוֹב, he apparently left it uncertain whether he approved of the king or of the horse, and a clear distinction could only be made where

the two elements differed in number or in gender. But, as a matter of fact, this did not seriously trouble the Semite. It was the whole concept that was good, as a complex, and for the immediate purpose the ambiguity did not greatly matter; a distinction did not occur to him unless it was forced on him by grammatical conditions. If he wished to make it clear, he could do so by a periphrasis with לְ.

One grammatical element alone could come between the construct and its genitive—the article. But this raises the question—which I can leave only as a question—as to whether the article is really a word or whether it is not rather to be regarded as an inflexion. The whole conception of determination is here involved, and it is worth noting that of the four main groups of Semitic speech, Assyrian had no means whatever of indicating determination, and that the Aramaean group invariably represented it by a terminal inflexion. We may be right in supposing that the primitive form of the article was הַל, but there is certainly no such *word* in Hebrew. It may, of course, be argued, especially in view of the history of this mode of determination in Hebrew, that it was originally derived from the relative שׁ, for whose independent existence there does seem to be evidence in Phoenician, and that it was first used with participles, being only gradually applied to nouns. But, on the other hand, in a Semitic language it is always a little difficult to draw the line between actual inflexion and agglutination, and if we had to consider Biblical Hebrew—and indeed Arabic—alone, we should have no more justification for denying the name of inflexion to this הַל than to the הִנ— of the Niph'al. But whatever be the origin of the article, I feel that in practice it amounts to a determinative inflexion. I do not for one moment believe that when the Hebrew said הַמֶּלֶךְ he was conscious of using two words. And I believe that a similar remark will apply to the use of the possessive pronominal suffixes.

I pass on to the forms of the verb. Here we have the concept in motion, no longer regarded simply as an object, but rather as an action. It is natural that, whilst a noun

may be either subject or predicate, a verb—I speak only of the finite forms—must be predicative. And the greater liveliness and mobility of verb-forms has inevitably meant a movement, if possible more rapid, with a heightening of the final syllable. This effect is produced by the presence of a changeable vowel in the second syllable of the stem. It is true that in certain forms the first syllable is also changeable, but this is the exception rather than the rule, occurring only in the Perfect Qal (2nd plural and when used with suffixes), and the characteristic verbal inflexions all involve change in the second syllable where possible.

The Semitic verb, or concept in action, is originally formed from a monosyllabic stem with preformatives indicating gender, number, and person. These, except in the third person, are derived from the pronouns, and are clearly reduced forms of them. The great age of the forms has meant very considerable diminution, but all are still recognizable. I shall not stay to enumerate them, contenting myself with remarks on one or two forms. A good deal of time has been spent in discussing the 3rd sing. masc. impf., the question at issue being the origin of the י preformative. This has been supposed in some quarters to be a relic of a pronoun of the 3rd person, but I am rather inclined to think of it as being merely prosthetic—an aid to pronunciation.[1] The genius of the Semitic languages does not lend itself to any special form for the 3rd person, cf. that later development which we call the perfect, where the 3rd sing. masc. is clearly the primary stem from which other numbers, genders, and persons are formed. The ת of the feminine, on the other hand, is clearly an indication of gender, and it might be due in the first instance to the close connexion between a subject and its following verb, were it not that the natural Semitic order is predicate first, subject second. The masculine

[1] Hence in the Qal it takes the 'natural' vowel; ḥireq in a closed syllable, qameç, in an open. The ִ of יִקְטֹל is due to a primitive *A* vowel, but not necessarily the ִ in יִקְטֹם. What other vowel could the Hebrew have used?

plurals are clearly of the same general formation as those of the noun. Arabic teaches us that the singular verb-forms may have had a final short unaccented vowel, though there seems to be no surviving trace of nasalization, and there is no difference between the plural form of the verb-ending in Arabic (and occasionally in Hebrew) and the nominative plural of the noun. Once again, in dealing with Semitic speech, we suspect a stage at which no obvious distinction was felt between noun and verb. The feminine plurals obviously spring from a form ending in *-ān*, with the vowel transposed in order to protect the final consonant. The great problem of the Hebrew forms is the identity of the 2nd and 3rd plural feminine; we may be satisfied by the supposition that the ת preformative of the latter is due to assimilation to the singular.

The 'imperfect' is the original inflexion of the finite verb, and it will be noticed that the conception of tense does not enter into it. As a matter of fact, it never did. The Semitic—including the Hebrew—mind did not readily dwell on the distinction between past, present, and future. The conception of a *succession* of events was familiar to them, and they indicated it in a peculiar way; but in the first instance it mattered little when these things happened. I find no feature of the Hebrew mind harder to appreciate than this. To us the kind of differentiation indicated by tense is a matter of fundamental importance; the Israelite laid no stress upon it. He could not have been unaware of it—at least, so it seems—but his mind did not dwell upon it. An event was equally an event, whether it happened yesterday or would happen to-morrow; a process was just as much a process, whether it belonged to history or to expectation.

On the other hand, this distinction between *event* and *process* was one which appealed to the Semite as soon as his language began to take characteristic shape. It is true that the demand for such a distinction was not sufficiently great to issue in grammatical forms till after the separation of the Mesopotamian group from its brethren, but the

psychological tendency was there, and was bound to produce, sooner or later, independent inflexional forms. The presence of the tendency and the absence of the forms are alike attested by a comparison of the Babylonian with the other Semitic groups of language. The former differentiated between the two modes of activity by a modification of the existing inflexional forms; the latter all produced new forms on a model which was not unknown at the point of separation, though its development in Mesopotamia was but slight. This was the attachment of the relevant pronouns at the end of a form of the root which suggests greater stability than that already in use.[1] A similar form made its appearance in Mesopotamia, in the conjugation of what is commonly called the Permansive—a form which more closely resembles the passive in its meaning—and it is particularly interesting to find, not only that this semi-participial form might thus be conjugated, but that certain nouns were open to the same treatment. Thus the Babylonian could say *paḳdaku* = I am appointed, and also *sarraku* = I am king. The probability is that we should regard these as nominal forms in Babylonian, but there is no doubt that the parallel inflexion belongs to the verb in the other Semitic groups, including Hebrew.

In one respect classical Hebrew retained a trace of the ancestry of its so-called imperfect. In the early days of Semitic speech the sound which was used to connect two words together was, apparently, a *W*, probably vocalized with a vowel of the first class. In a connected narrative two verbs would not infrequently stand together, with this syllable between them. Again, we have to note a divergence in the phonetic history of the Mesopotamian and the other groups. The former seem never to have been clear as to the distinction between *M* and *W*, and pronounced this connecting syllable *MA*. Arabic, on the other hand, modified the consonant to a *P* or an *F*, while in Palestine and the fringes of the fertile crescent the *W* sound was retained. Further, to the Mesopotamian ear this syllable

[1] This suffixed form may be due to Hamitic influence.

attached itself to the first of the two verbs which it linked together; the other groups heard it as a part of the second. Consequently, when the necessity arose for the insertion of other words, it took its place at the beginning of the Hebrew word, and the combined form became the natural inflexion of narrative, long surviving the growth and establishment of a perfect. Even in the older Aramaic there seem to be traces of this 'waw consecutive', though it had disappeared by the time Aramaic became a literary language, and even in Hebrew it failed to survive the classical period. By way of differentiation—so, at least, it seems most probable to me—a simple ו was prefixed to the perfect when it was necessary to use the imperfect idea in narrative.

A grasp of the difference between the perfect and the imperfect is fundamental to an appreciation of Hebrew narrative, and, indeed, to an understanding of the Hebrew mind. While, as I have said, the Semite did not greatly trouble whether that which he described was present, past, or future, he was deeply concerned to distinguish between a process and an event. If it were the former he used the imperfect, and his mind stood, as it were, on the bank of a stream. He was not concerned with its source, nor even with the goal towards which it flowed. But he was conscious that here was movement, development, progress. Sometimes he might feel himself to be contemplating the fountain and spring whence the stream flowed; he stood at the beginning of the process. He might go even farther back, and be faced with the mere attempt at an action. On the other hand, the point immediately before him might appeal to him as one of a recurrent series; the stream continued without failing, each particle identical with its predecessor and with its successor, separately noticeable, yet continuous with the rest.

In clear contrast to this stood, to the Semitic mentality, the conception of an act regarded simply as an event; we might almost apply to conceptions expressed by the perfect the relativist definition of an event—'that which has

position in its four-dimensional environment'. It happened (or is happening, or will happen—this difference is comparatively immaterial); that is the essential characteristic of the thought, the feature upon which the choice of form fixes the mind of the hearer. It is thus history—possibly even future history, and can be conceived as a settled thing, taking its place in the great series of events which constitutes what we call time. We may partly express the *nuance* by the use of an aorist—past definite or whatever we like to call it—but no form in Indo-European speech serves to cover all the uses of the perfect, and when it is applied to future events, the use of a future perfect is but a clumsy attempt to expound the Hebrew thought. When Naomi says of Boaz לֹא יִשְׁקֹט הָאִישׁ כִּי־ אִם־כִּלָּה הַדָּבָר הַיּוֹם, she implies that the indefinite process implied in getting peace will only be possible to Boaz when the settlement of the matter in hand takes its place as a definite fact of history, till he is in a position to say 'it happened then'. In such a case we too use the perfect, but it is with us a feebler instrument of expression. Perhaps we realize the essential distinction between the two only when we find an alternation between them. The youthful shepherd stands before the king (1 Sam. xvii. 34 f.) and offers his qualifications for the post of Israelite champion against the Philistine giant:—רֹעֶה הָיָה עַבְדְּךָ לְאָבִיו בְּצֹאן וּבָא הָאֲרִי וְאֶת־הַדֹּב וְנָשָׂא שֶׂה מֵעֲדָרוֹ: וְיָצָאתִי אַחֲרָיו וְהִכִּיתִיו וְהִצַּלְתִּי מִפִּיו וַיָּקָם עָלַי וְהֶחֱזַקְתִּי בִּזְקָנוֹ וְהִכִּיתִיו וַהֲמִיתִיו: The sudden introduction of the perfect (ו consecutive with imperfect) וַיָּקָם throws a brilliant flash of light on what is passing in David's mind. It is quite true that the pursuit of wild animals is a part of his regular life. Not once but many times has he had to track the marauder and obtain from him evidence that it is not the fault of the shepherd that the flock has suffered loss. It is, to use our colloquial phrase, 'all in the day's work'. But suddenly for an instant David's thought fixes on a particular occasion. It is not necessary to assume that he is speaking somewhat too loftily, and that he is exaggerating an incident into a habit. But, for the instant,

as he describes the habit the incident breaks through, and we suddenly see a particular lion rising to attack the daring shepherd who would rob him of a part of his booty. We gain an extraordinary vividness and sense of reality—the picture becomes stereoscopic.

A third form often used in Semitic languages as a finite verb—though it is only in some types of Aramaic that it develops into an inflexional form—is the participle. Here we have the original nominal form beyond possibility of mistake, and we can trace the steps by which modern Syriac has made it into a present tense, for even in the old Syriac Gospels the pronoun and the participle are not infrequently welded into a single word. We thus have a phenomenon closely parallel to the west Semitic perfect. But though the participle in classical Hebrew retained its nominal form throughout, it still carried its verbal force, and, from the psychological point of view, if from no other, must be regarded normally as nearly akin to the so-called finite forms.

The meaning and intention of the participle are usually compared with those of the imperfect. To me they recall rather the perfect, for there is no suggestion of progress involved in the participle. The perfect sets an action before us as an event, complete and finished in itself at a definite point in time. The participle gives us a picture of a state or condition. We are not asked to consider when it happened, or even whether it has happened, is happening, or will happen. We are simply asked to consider it as something that is there. We have no hint of movement; as far as we are concerned while we contemplate the word and its import, the scene is timeless, changeless, motionless. The difference between the imperfect and the participle is almost precisely the difference between the exhibition on the screen of a cinema film and of an ordinary lantern slide. We feel that where the participle is used we can study the facts in detail; the imperfect hurries us on from some preceding position to a following state or action. If the imperfect suggests a stream, the participle suggests a lake.

We may perhaps peer a little deeper into the Hebrew mind if we consider the possible use of the three forms in what we call the 'circumstantial clause'. This always appeals to me as one of the most characteristic features of Hebrew style. It is an attempt to give, with the simplest syntactical adjustments, the background against which the main events are to be seen. Let me quote from Jud. iii. 20, leaving one word unpointed : וְאֶהוּד בָּא אֵלָיו וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב בַּעֲלִיַּת הַמְּקֵרָה׃. We may point the unvocalized word in any one of three ways. Suppose we read it יָשַׁב. It then means 'Now Ehud had gone in to him, and found that he had taken his seat in the cool upper chamber'. Our attention is called to the royal act. At some definite point in time Eglon had sat down ; the result of that action is obvious to Ehud and to us, but, in weighing the comparative importance of the two, it is the event and not its consequent situation which bears down the scale. Both suggestions are present, but the former more strongly claims our attention. The event has taken place. Now let us follow the traditional pointing and pronounce the word יֹשֵׁב. Now Ehud 'found him sitting'. This is no longer a piece of history, it is a tableau. A curtain is suddenly drawn from a work of art. Even that attenuated sense of temporal series which the Hebrew possessed is for the moment in abeyance ; the flow of time has been interrupted, and we stand in front of a picture. We can study the shapeless mass of royal obesity, the rolls of fat standing out on wrists and neck, the puffy cheeks, the black eye sparkling through its swollen lids, just as we may note the details in Watts's picture of Mammon. The participle compels us to take pause and look, there is neither change nor movement in the scene till we choose to pass on to the next phrase, and for the time being we are conscious of neither past nor future, all is one static present. A magic spell has been thrown over the world of our attention, and every item is frozen into the attitude in which we have caught it with the sudden lifting of the veil. But suppose we point יֵשֵׁב. At once the scene is alive. Eglon is actually taking his seat when Ehud enters, and we are no

longer looking at a picture ; we are watching a process. We mark the slow movements of the huge and cumbrous frame, and watch the uncouth figure subsiding into its place, the uncertain outline adapting itself to the shape of the divan. But we cannot stay to linger over any one attitude, for the tense hurries us on till the clumsy action is over, when at once we are prepared for new developments. This is not a record, not even a tableau ; a scene is actually being played before our eyes.

I would close with a few remarks on the relation between grammar and style. It will be universally conceded that the noblest monument of our literature, perhaps of all literature, is the English Authorized Version of the Bible. Closer examination will suggest that, apart from a few very notable passages, it is the Old Testament rather than the New which justifies this aesthetic estimate. I doubt whether it is always realized that some of those elements which go to make up the greatness of the Authorized Version are due to the fact that it is an attempt to give a literal translation of a Hebrew original. Hebrew has a directness and a love of the concrete which make for simplicity. For example, Semitic languages have no true passive, as we understand the term in Indo-European speech, i. e. a grammatical form whereby the object of the action becomes the subject of the verb, and the doer is indicated by a peculiar form or construction. It is only in Syriac that such a passive is found freely, though there are possible traces of it in Hebrew. What we call the passive in Hebrew is really a mode of expressing an indeterminate subject. 'Somebody did it, we do not know who' is the thought naturally suggested by the passive forms. In Arabic there is no means of representing the agent after a passive, and in Hebrew this is very seldom done. On the contrary, the object of the action—in strict grammar, according to our methods, the subject of the verb—is frequently mentioned in the Accusative case!

To this directness we have to add a great simplicity of syntax. Hebrew has comparatively few connecting parti-

cies, and comparatively few ways of forming a subordinate sentence. Its natural form of expression is through a series of coordinate clauses, linked together by ו consecutive. The 'period', as we understand it in such a writer as Livy, or in such a speaker as the late W. E. Gladstone, is utterly impossible. The nearest approach that we have is in the long sentences characteristic of the Deuteronomic style, and even there the effect is produced mainly by the heaping up of coordinate clauses in the protasis of a conditional or semi-conditional sentence. So much is this a feature of Hebrew prose style that where it is necessary to state the circumstances or conditions at the beginning of an account, the ordinary method of doing so is to prefix a וַיְהִי, followed by another ו consecutive when the condition has been adequately described. Oratio obliqua, too, is rare and awkward, its place being taken by oratio recta. We might say in English: 'On receipt of the news of his father's death, realizing the hopelessness of his position, he bade his men fight bravely, since their safety depended on their own exertions'. Hebrew would say something like this: וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הֻגַּד לוֹ לֵאמֹר מֵת אָבִיךָ וַיַּרְא כִּי אֵין לוֹ מוֹשִׁיעַ וַיֵּצֵא אֶת־נְעָרָיו לֵאמֹר אִמְצוּ לְהִלָּחֵם כִּי־אֵין כַּצֵּילְכֶם רַק זְרוֹעֲכֶם תַּצִּיל אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵכֶם׃

I would also call attention to one feature of a really great style which our English Bible owes to its Hebrew original. This is the sense of dignity, restraint, and power which results from a sparing use of adjectives. Every student must be struck with the very small supply of these words possessed by Hebrew. We have the expression of a few elementary qualities, good, bad, big, little, holy, profane—and many of these are rather participial or nominal than strictly adjectival—bodily defects, and one or two colour words. The colour words deserve a whole study themselves, as illustrating the colour sense of the ancient Hebrews, but I resist the temptation to digress. It is partly the paucity of adjectives which gives its stateliness and dignity to our Old Testament in the Authorized Version. There is no adjective in Ps. 23, in Ps. 29 we have רַבִּים once, in the fourth 'Servant Song' we have רַבִּים (three

times), and עֲצוּמִים (once), but both are used as substantives, and the only possible adjective is the construct חֲדַל, which has every appearance of being an old stative participle. The great chaos-vision of Jer. iv. 23–6 has no adjective at all. 1 Kings xix has רַב in vv. 4 and 7, the first time used practically as a substantive, and the second time as a predicate, while in v. 11 we have רוּחַ גְּדוֹלָה וְחָזָק. That is all. In Jb. iii we have גַּלְמוּד in v. 7, טָמוּן in v. 16, יָגִיעֵי in v. 17, קָטֹן וְגָדוֹל in v. 19 and מָרֵי in v. 20. The second is a passive participle in form and meaning, the third and last are used practically as substantives, and so are also the two common adjectives in v. 19. I think these passages, selected at random, may serve to illustrate my point, but I believe that a detailed study of the question would show that Hebrew adjectives are few in number and sparingly used, especially as attributes. In the course of history, it is true, the style undergoes some change, and from the seventh century onwards we may expect to find a growing number in our texts. They begin to be more numerous, for instance, in the Deuteronomic style.

Hebrew, then, is the language of a people who, from our point of view, present many peculiarities and suffer from some grave deficiencies. They had no gift for that type of abstraction which alone makes philosophical thinking possible. They were incapable of analytic thought, and the time relation meant comparatively little to them. But, on the other hand, they possessed a concrete directness of thought, a clarity of vision, an instinct for synthesis, and an appreciation of reality, which made them ideal exponents of truth for simple people. And they had a great and stately music in their soul. I doubt not that others beside myself will feel that no better instrument than the Hebrew mind could have been found for the supreme literary revelation of God.

PRINTED IN ENGLAND AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS, OXFORD
BY JOHN JOHNSON
PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

Date Due

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JAN. 2 1962

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